

Prairie and Savanna Restoration on Rice Lake Flats

What's Going On?

The St. Croix Watershed Research Station (a field station of the Science Museum of Minnesota) in partnership with the National Park Service is initiating an effort to restore and study native prairie habitat on 30 acres southwest of 221st and Rice Lake Road. This project has two purposes: 1) re-create a sliver of critical habitat and 2) serve as a study site to evaluate techniques that maximize the habitat value of restoration methods.



Prairie restoration, with high diversity of native flowers, blooming in the fourth year after planting.

Why?

At the time of European settlement St. Croix County was a patchwork of prairie, savanna, and oak forest. (see back) Over 99% of the prairie is gone. Rice Lake Flats represents a unique opportunity to restore some of this habitat which provides critical nesting and brooding cover for waterfowl, songbirds, and turkey

Oak savanna remnant in southern St. Croix County. Note the scattered oak, patches of hazel shrubs on the slope and prairie wildflowers in the foreground. (photo by H. Halvorson)

What you will see.

Job one (summer 2005) is to remove the box elders, brush and invading trees. We will be leaving the oaks. This will be a dramatic change and, at first, may appear unsightly. Be patient. Second, we will plough some of the land shallowly and return to kill the newly sprouting weeds.

Finally, in the fall of 2006 or the spring of 2007 most of the acres will be planted with different mixtures of native prairie flowers and grasses. Again be patient...prairie takes time to mature. It should start to look like a prairie about 3 years after planting. If you have a discerning eye, you should see that some planted areas look different from others; this is part of the study. Different planting variables will cause some areas to have different compositions of grasses and flowers.

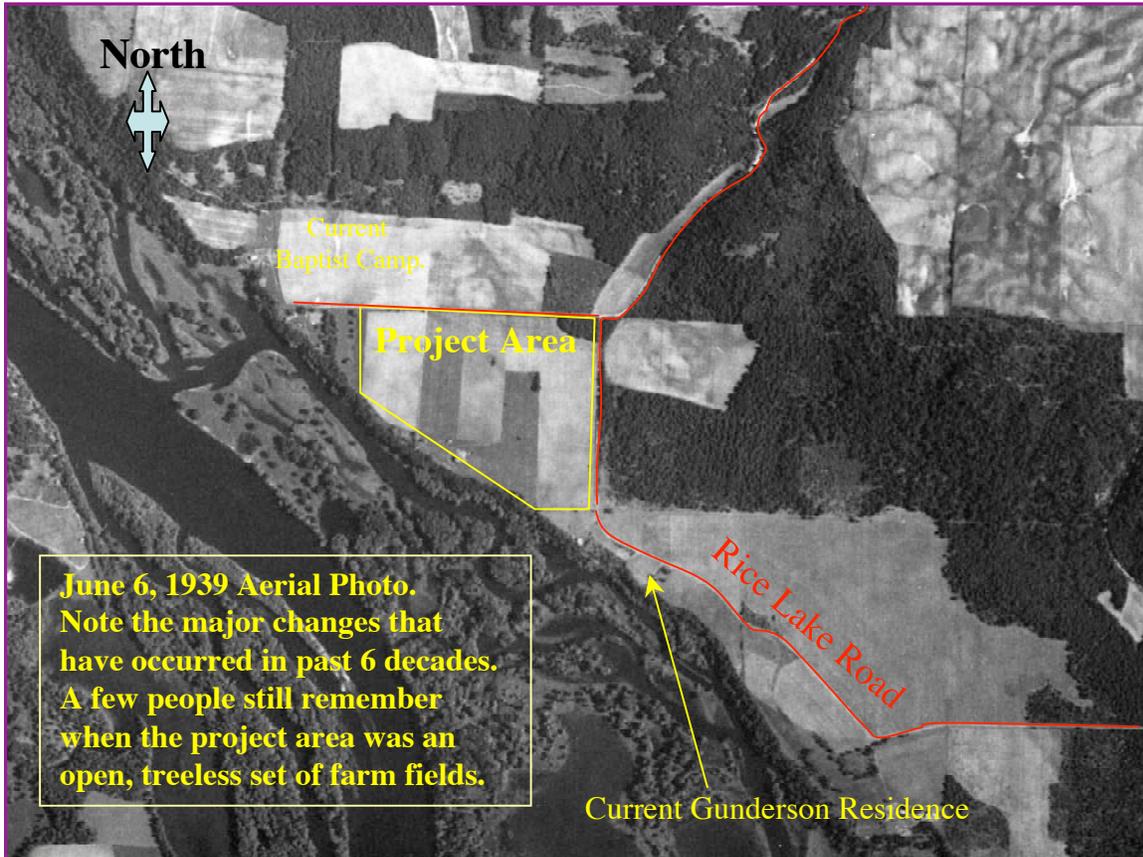
Patches of the site have retained some of their remnant prairie/savanna features. These areas will not be ploughed and will ultimately become pockets of oak savanna scattered throughout the prairie complex.



Thank you for your patience.

This project will take time. In the short term we need your patience and understanding. The habitat created here is for all of us and is part of our legacy to the next generation.

The way it once looked



Township 31 North Range 19 West 4th Meridian
 Chain East Boundary between Section 8 & 17
 Variation 8° East
 8000 Intersected 186 links South of post
 West Corner between Section 8 & 17
 Variation 9 20 East
 4000 Set 1/4 Section post
 East Oak 60 N 26° 18'
 East Oak 53 65 E 8
 8000 Section Corner
 East 1/2 broken set 2° into considerable
 Oak brush no timber W 1/2 a bench
 bottom very level set 2° into some
 Dead & Live Oak trees not much brush

Original Surveyor's Notes, 1848

Notes along boundary between Section 17 and Section 8 (road leading to Baptist Camp.)

"Oak brush, no timber. West half a bench bottom, very level. Soils 2nd rate. Some bur and jack oak trees. Not much brush"

This entry and notes from nearby surveys clearly show that the project area was an oak savanna/prairie at the time of settlement and the surrounding area was a patchwork of oak forest, floodplain forest, savanna and prairie. White pines were only present in areas protected from the frequent fires common to this time period.